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SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

17 November 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 288

SUBJECT: The Internal Security Situation in Azerbaijan and
the Kurdish Area of Iran*

1. In view of the gloomy tone of some recent reports on the internal security situation in Azerbaijan and the Kurdish area of Iran, a survey of conditions in those areas may be of use to the Board. A number of reports about the deterioration of the situation in northwest Iran were available during preparation of NIE-75 and were at least indirectly reflected in it; Paragraph 26, for example, made specific reference to the probability that the carrying out of a governmental agrarian reform program would require increased use of force and would be accompanied by an increased number of peasant-landlord clashes, while the statement of security force capabilities for maintaining order (Para 28) was formulated at a time when considerable data on heightened unrest in northwest Iran was available to G-2 and OIR. In considering the security situation in NIE-75, however, it was not felt necessary to make specific reference to the possibility of a serious deterioration of the central government's authority in Azerbaijan or the Kurdish area. This subject is covered briefly below.

2. A certain amount of unrest and disorder, arising out of local quarrels and rivalries and out of long-standing distrust of the central government and the security forces, is normal in areas like Azerbaijan and the Kurdish region, particularly in the fall, when the tribes move to winter quarters and when disputes over the division of crops are likely to arise. This year, however, the

* See attached map.

DOCUMENT NO. 46
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐
☐ DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S (C)
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 1990
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 14/2/80 REVIEWER: 019360

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situation has been aggravated by three additional factors: (a) Mossadeq's decree that landlords turn back 20 percent of their rentals, half to go directly to the peasants and half to be used for social welfare; (b) the Tudeh Party's new efforts to secure peasant support; and (c) the government's manifest inability to cope fully with the new security problems facing it or to check the trend toward economic stagnation. The incidence and scale of peasant-landlord clashes has increased, and in some cases the small 5-12 man gendarmerie outposts have been moved back into the towns. Banditry has become more common. Mossadeq's efforts at land reform have inevitably alienated large numbers of landlords. At the same time, they appear to have benefitted Tudeh as much as the government among the peasants. In many instances Mossadeq's 20 percent decree, instead of satisfying the peasant, has merely whetted his appetite for more sweeping land reform, which Tudeh propaganda and the memories of the autonomous Azerbaijan and Kurdish republics have led many to consider an exclusively Communist idea.

3. Deterioration of the situation has gone furthest in the Kurdish area. A number of the Kurdish chiefs -- traditional foes of the government, concerned about the spread of Tudeh influence among their villagers, and themselves landlords with no other major source of income -- have formally refused to obey Mossadeq's crop distribution decree, even though provincial authorities have now been instructed to use the army to enforce it if necessary. In addition, various Kurdish leaders have been working to develop closer cooperation among the tribes. These efforts have been made primarily with a view to combatting Tudeh influence and planning what course of action to follow in the event that Azerbaijan and Kurdistan fall under Soviet domination but they also tend to strengthen the Kurdish tribes vis-a-vis the government. The government has officially discouraged any idea of a Kurdish anti-Communist organization.

4. Although the situation in northwest Iran is clearly one to be watched closely, G-2 -- the IAC agency most directly concerned with internal security matters -- is emphatically of the opinion that developments in that area are not likely to result during 1953 in either the establishment of autonomous regimes in Azerbaijan or the Kurdish area or in a grave weakening of the central government's

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authority throughout the country. G-2's views are generally supported by the data currently available here and in O/CI. It is apparent that the task of maintaining order has become more difficult; a high gendarmerie official stated in early October that his organization can no longer be counted on to do so without army assistance. It is also apparent that a government effort to extend its writ (notably the crop distribution decree) to the more remote reaches of the Kurdish hinterland might involve difficult and lengthy military operations.

5. Nevertheless, the government still retains an overwhelming preponderance of force. It appears unlikely that peasant unrest, now directed mainly against the landlords, will be sufficiently diverted into pro-Tudeh, activist channels to provide a favorable opportunity for the introduction of sizable guerrilla forces from the Soviet Union -- a necessity if the balance of military power is to be redressed. It also appears unlikely that the Kurdish chiefs, who have never been able to develop the degree of unity possessed by the other major tribal groups in Iran, will be able to achieve sufficiently close cooperation to permit an organized revolt against the Tehran regime. The principal danger is rather that the army forces in the Kurdish area may be drawn into punitive operations against one or more Kurdish tribes, thus contributing to general unrest and specifically encouraging the tribes of other areas in their normal tendency to seek to limit the extent of government control over them and their territories. Even if the government undertook such a course, however, it is unlikely that the government would provoke a fight with other tribal groups at the same time or that the tribal leaders, most of whom are mindful of the Communist danger, would undertake action which seriously undermined the government. It was estimated in NIE-75 that the security forces are capable of handling anything short of simultaneous nation-wide riots and disturbances.



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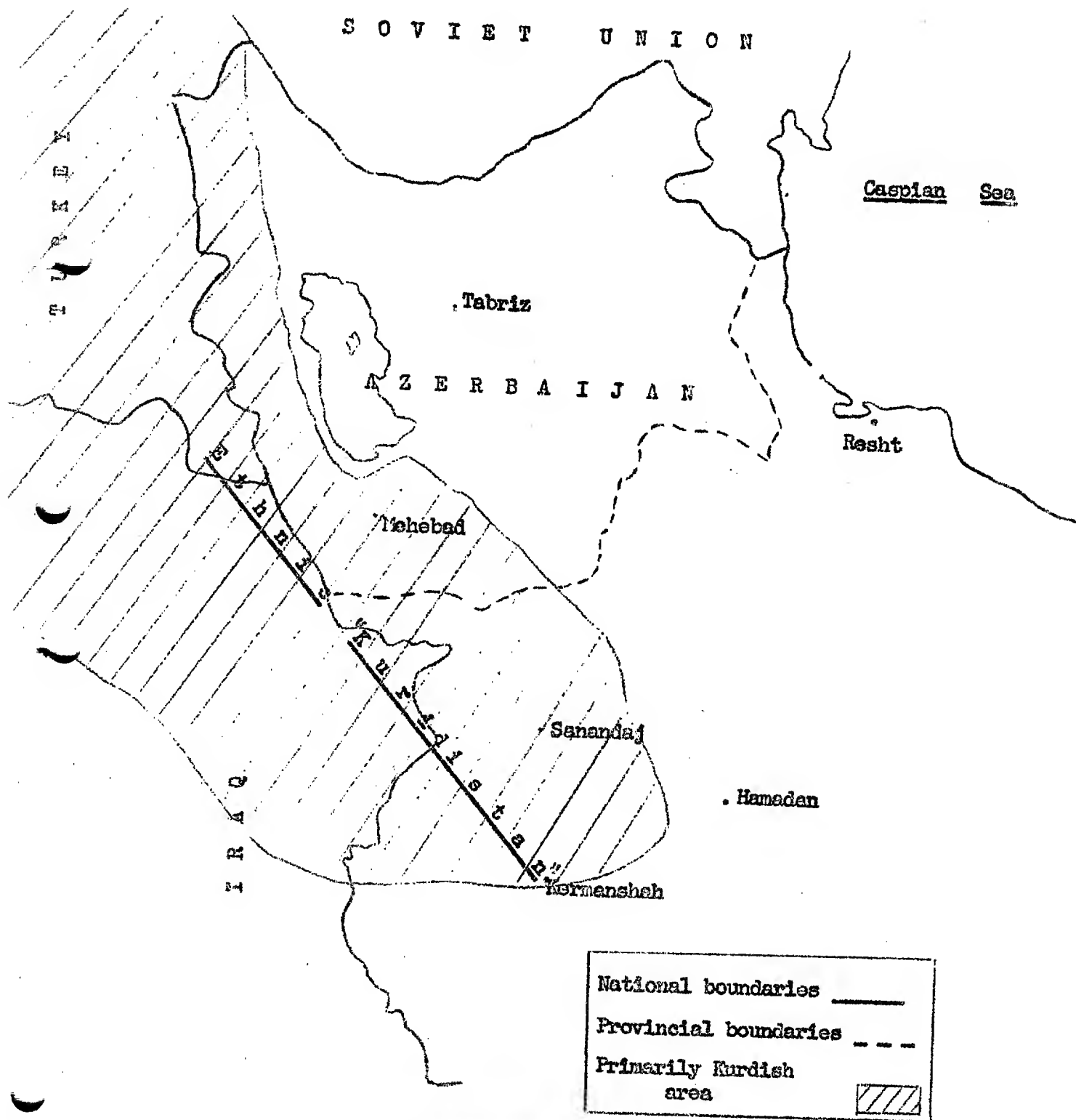
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NORTHWEST IRAN, SHOWING BOUNDARIES OF AZERBAIJAN

AND THE EXTENT OF THE PRIMARILY KURDISH AREA



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